

STATEMENT BY THE VATICAN'S PCRRWJ AND THE CHIEF RABBINATE OF ISRAEL (FEBRUARY 26, 2003)

**Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Commission for Jewish-Catholic Dialogue
February 26, 2003**

After a preliminary meeting in Jerusalem on June 5, 2002, members of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Commission for Jewish-Catholic Dialogue met again with the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, February 23-27, 2003, in Rome.

Acknowledging the basis for their ongoing dialogue as one grounded in truthfulness, honesty, and respect for each other's distinct religious identities, their discussions focused on their common call to give witness to God by a willingness to cooperate in fostering shared religious values, and furthering peace, justice, truth and love. In particular, the sanctity of human life and family values were discussed and the following statement was reached through consensus.

The Sanctity of Human Life

Human life is of unique and highest value in our world. Any attempt to destroy human life must be rejected, and every common effort should be made, in order to promote human rights, solidarity among all human beings and respect for freedom of conscience.

Our common religious motivation for this central affirmation is based on the biblical statement that human beings are created in the image of the living God, in His likeness (cf. Genesis 1:26). God is the Holy One and the Creator of human life, and human beings are blessed and obliged by His holiness. Therefore every human life is holy, sacrosanct and inviolable. According to Leviticus 19:2, God's holiness constitutes an essential imperative for the moral behavior: "You shall be holy for I am Holy, the Lord your God."

To protect human life is an evident ethical consequence of this conviction. Every believer, particularly religious leaders, should cooperate in protecting human life. Any attack against the life of a human being runs contrary to the will of God, is a desecration of God's name, directly opposed to the teaching of the Prophets. Taking any human life, including one's own, even in the name of God is sacrilegious. As was emphasized time and again by Pope John Paul II in his message for the World Day of Peace 2002, no religious leader can condone terrorism anywhere in the world. It is a profanation of religion to declare oneself a terrorist in the name of God, to do violence to others in His name. Terrorist violence everywhere in the world is a contradiction of faith in God, the Creator of humanity, who cares for and loves him.

As religious leaders of faith communities, we have an extraordinary responsibility for the education of our communities and particularly the younger generation in respect for holiness of human life. We should not admit any killing in the name of God who commands, "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17), avoiding fanatical or violent abuse of religion, as Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders declared in the common statement of Alexandria (January 2002). We all should unite our energies towards the construction of a better world for life, brotherhood, justice, peace and love among all.

There are cultural and educational implications regarding our cooperation in this field. All educators should strengthen their efforts in devising programs to educate the young in respect for the highest value of human life. Against the present trend of violence and death in our societies, we should foster our cooperation with believers of all religions and all people of good will in promoting a "culture of life."

Family Values

The institution of the family stems from the will of the Almighty who created human beings in the image of God; "male and female He created them" (Genesis 1: 27). Marriage in a religious perspective has great value because God blessed this union and sanctified it.

Family and home unity provides a warm and protecting surrounding that nurtures children and ensures their proper education, in keeping with tradition and beliefs. The family unit is the basis for a wholesome society.

Doubtless, the electronic and media revolution has brought about positive changes in society. However, at the same time too often, a negative influence on the behavior of society has developed. Adults and the young alike are exposed to distorted and perverted aspects of life, such as violence and pornography. As religious leaders we are challenged by these destructive developments.

More than ever, we are obliged to educate at home and in the school towards family values, following our rich religious traditions. Parents should devote more time to show their love to their children and guide them towards positive attitudes. Among other important family values we should stress love, unselfishness, care for life and mutual responsibility for children and parents (cf. Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). From this perspective, we cannot agree to alternative models of couples' union and of the family.

"For I have chosen him [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (Genesis 18:19).

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